

EZEKIEL'S CODE AND THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

*Guided by keys in
the Book of Ezekiel,
a European
expedition
conducted a dig
underneath
Jerusalem in
1909–11 to find the
hiding place of the
sacred biblical
artefact, the Ark of
the Covenant.*

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Could the real Indiana Jones have been Finnish? Early in the 20th century, a Finnish scholar and poet named Valter Henrik Juvelius (1865–1922) claimed to know where the Ark of the Covenant was hidden. Juvelius believed that certain ciphers in biblical passages—when read in their original Hebrew format—could reveal the secret hiding place of the greatest biblical treasure on record. He thus obtained a Hebrew Old Testament and tried to solve the problem...before going to the Holy Land and digging underneath the Temple Mount, the most holy site for three of the world's major religions.

Juvelius qualified as a surveyor in 1887 and completed his academic studies, receiving the title Candidate of Philosophy the following year. For the next 20 years, he served as a surveyor at Ilmajoki and Lapua. In 1897, he published his first collection of poems, entitled *Kuvia ja säveliä* ("Images and Notes"). One of the poems he wrote, "Karjalan Kunnailla" ("O Hills of Karelia"), is still very well known in Finland. He also translated many Swedish and Finnish authors, as well as the works of foreign writers such as Goethe, Burns, Byron and Poe into Finnish. For the poetry books and translations, Juvelius used the pen name "Valter Juva".

Nothing so far in the life of Juvelius indicated what direction his work and legacy would take. But a clue can be found in his doctoral dissertation, written in Swedish and presented in 1906 to the Imperial Alexander University of Finland (nowadays Helsinki University). The subject was Jewish chronology and his thesis was approved; he was now "Doctor Juvelius". Nevertheless, there was no direct connection between his subject matter and his ensuing quest for the Ark of the Covenant. Clearly, though, Juvelius was moving in this direction.

He was a man of letters but also a man of ciphers, it seemed. Juvelius became convinced that the Old Testament Book of Ezekiel contained a secret code that described the location of the Ark of the Covenant and the route to it. This was decades before Eli Rips, as reported by Michael Drosnin, believed he had found a "Bible code", but decades after "Egyptologists" had "identified" a biblical chronology in the passageways of the Great Pyramid. The Book of Ezekiel is, in essence, prophetic but has been interpreted in various ways, from giving an accurate description of an extraterrestrial spaceship to referring to the fixed cross of the Zodiac, as cosmologist Patrizia Norelli-Bachelet believes the vision describes. For Juvelius, it concerned the Ark of the Covenant.

The secret location of where the Ark was kept in safety, Juvelius believed, had only been known to Ezekiel and the high priests. Little is known about Ezekiel, but we do know that he was a priest in the temple at Jerusalem, was the son of a priest and had a wife prior to being carried off in the Jewish Exile of 597 BC at the age of twenty-six. He died before the captivity in Babylon ended. If the Ark was still present in Jerusalem in 597 BC (there is no hard evidence that it was...or wasn't), and if it had been secreted away ahead of the invading army, then the secret of where the priests had hidden the precious artefact was about to die with them. Hence, they needed to preserve that knowledge so that a future generation could retrieve the most precious of Jewish artefacts.

This theory could explain how the Ark disappeared, as well as the Bible's consequent silence on this point—though it is equally possible historically that the Ark disappeared several centuries earlier. The central question, of course, is whether the Book of Ezekiel did contain a code—and if it did, it seems worthy of a new Dan Brown novel!

Juvelius was convinced that he had cracked the Ezekiel code. Like so many who believe they have cracked a code, he drew maps and sketches, pointing to the exact place



Replica of the Ark of the Covenant on display at the Church of Saint Roch, Paris (Photo: Philip Coppens)

where these treasures rested. He believed that there were underground tunnels which led from the area of the Gihon Spring (the main water source in First Temple times) to the Temple Mount—and to the location of the Ark of the Covenant. During the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 BC, King Hezekiah of Judah built a tunnel to access the Temple Mount, and the Pool of Siloam to act as its reservoir. Juvelius was specifically interested in the tunnel system known as "Hezekiah's Tunnel", discovered in 1838, and the cave system called "Warren's Shaft", found in 1867 by an Englishman, Captain Charles Warren. These water systems, Juvelius believed, had been adapted and reworked, beyond what was known so far, into a series of underground tunnels.

But it is one thing to believe something and another to investigate it on the ground. Juvelius knew that a dig on—or, even worse, *under*—the Temple Mount was not only illegal, it was sacrilegious and thus was very unlikely to receive any permission whatsoever to go ahead. Still, to obtain an excavation permit, Juvelius would have to get approval from the Turkish government. There were two major problems: first, despite what some later records would allege, he did not have enough money to finance the operation himself; second, it seemed most unlikely that a Finnish surveyor would be given such a permit.

To realise his ambition, Juvelius formed a company in London in 1908 in the name of JMPFW Ltd, which included the initials of the surnames of the planned expedition's original members: Juvelius, Millen, Parker, Forth and Waughan. All except the Finnish Juvelius and the Swedish engineer Millen were English noblemen. He hoped that this approach would greatly improve his chances for a permit, if only because the entire financing of the expedition would now be catered for. Chief amongst this group of sponsors was Captain Montague Parker (1878–1962). Juvelius had persuaded this son of an English duke that, though the Ark of the Covenant was

priceless, the Ark and other treasures secreted in the system were worth at least US\$200 million. Parker managed to collect \$125,000 from various English and American financiers. Juvelius then proceeded to Constantinople to get excavation permits from the Ottoman government. To guarantee a positive outcome, he promised that half of the treasure would be theirs—without being too specific as to whether "theirs" meant the government officials themselves or the government. The application was successful.

The Juvelius expedition is not well-known and one might think we have only his account on which to rely. That is not correct: other accounts of the expedition exist, and one source is Millen, who wrote the book *On Right Tracks* in 1922 (though some sources list 1917 as the date of publication). He was a member of the expedition and believed that the discovery of the Ark would herald the new Millennium, as mentioned in the Book of Revelation. As such, he was convinced that the expedition was a quest to change the future of mankind.

The Parker expedition arrived in Jerusalem in August 1909. Though the team had received a permit, it was—unremarkably—not allowed to dig in the Temple area itself. Instead, the team began excavations 600 metres to the south of the area, at the Gihon Spring, which had been the starting point of Juvelius's decoding. A long road lay ahead to where Juvelius hoped to end up...but he was sure he would get there.

The work was a major—and hence costly—undertaking: excavation of the underground water system was only made possible by diverting the water from its normal course, which meant that the team members needed to build dams and pump out water. Worse was the fact that once they were inside, they realised that Hezekiah's Tunnel had parts that were only 18

centimetres high, which meant that the clearing operation was gigantic. All of a sudden, clearing 600 metres seemed like 600 kilometres.

As if he didn't already have enough problems, Parker received criticism that none of the team members was a trained, let alone qualified, archaeologist. He therefore approached the French Dominican Louis-Henri Vincent, a qualified archaeologist, who agreed to join the team. Vincent was aided by Father Sabiniak, the photographer of the Ecole Biblique. Together, they documented the tunnels and channels unearthed by the workers as well as the finds dug up inside.

The start of the excavations also meant that Juvelius's theory would be tested, and either proved or falsified. It should therefore not come as a major revelation that, from here on, there are two different accounts—underlining the fact that there are always (at least) two sides to every story.

According to Millen's book, for three years the expedition penetrated ever deeper, past labyrinths and tunnels. He stated that they found poisonous gas in some of the tunnels, which caused burns and dizziness, but it is more likely that this was natural gas, which miners often come across in mineshafts. With every metre gained, Millen became more convinced about the legitimacy of the decipherment: Juvelius would predict upcoming features of the underground network before stumbling across them and would know which routes to take—all of this based on his decoding of the Book of Ezekiel.



Valter Henrik Juvelius

Millen added that on most occasions the artificial walls looked exactly like natural rock, and the team could only penetrate through them by using Juvelius's decipherment of the book. They circumvented several traps, and as they progressed they stumbled upon vases, urns, lamps and other artefacts that bore the seal of Solomon. They were sure they were getting closer. The Ark of the Covenant was almost within reach.

The other side of the story goes that the excavations continued throughout the summer and autumn of 1909 before they were stopped due to incessant rainstorms. The excavations were resumed in August 1910, and the clearing of the water systems continued. Certain artefacts were discovered and photographed. At the same time, Vincent drew accurate maps of the ancient water systems; his records are still used by scholars, showing that the expedition continues to have archaeological benefits. But this version states that these tunnels, rather than coming closer to the final hiding place of the Ark or the Temple Mount, did not lead to the Temple Mount at all. Therefore, Parker abandoned Juvelius's "indications" and decided to dig new tunnels in the search for the Temple's treasures. The tunnels were lined with wooden beams to prevent collapse. Did this tunnelling, meant to force the excavations in the direction of the Temple Mount, have any correspondence with Millen's description that "the artificial walls looked exactly like natural rock"?

If Parker had abandoned Juvelius's "help", the expedition soon had to do without him: during the fall of 1910, Juvelius became sick, apparently with malaria, and travelled back to Finland. The accounts converged once again in April 1911, at the start of the third season, when everyone agreed that they were "close". They were indeed. For one, the excavation permit was about to expire in November 1911. A radical approach was needed, and Parker was not afraid to take up the challenge. Juvelius was preparing to return to Jerusalem, to be present in what he hoped would be the final breakthrough. It would be his crowning moment, the start of a new era. But before leaving Finland, he was informed by Parker of something he had already been able to read in the newspapers: his expedition had just become headline news across the globe.

Though Millen was convinced of Juvelius's decoding, Parker, it seems, was less so. Still, Parker was savvy enough to realise that digging under the Temple Mount, in whatever framework and regardless of any theories, was a "good move" which could lead to the discovery of the Ark or other treasure. Furthermore, from the very first day of the expedition, it wasn't Juvelius's decoding alone that was the main driving force: an Irish clairvoyant stated that he had seen the hiding place of the Ark in a séance, and it was his vision that was the primary impetus for the final attempt in April 1911, which explains why Juvelius was not present when controversy erupted. Parker needed to know where the final resting place was—immediately. He didn't want to proceed with Juvelius's long-winded voyage through underground labyrinths, which after some distance seemed to turn away from the Temple Mount. He didn't have the



The 1909-11 expedition leader, Captain Montague Parker

time to follow "Ezekiel's Ark hunt", or he no longer believed that Juvelius's maps would bring them to fortune.

That April, the Passover, the Greek Orthodox Easter and the Nabi Musa festival coincided. Parker realised that Jerusalem would be preoccupied with many religious festivals, some of them taking place outside of the town, thus presenting a great opportunity for his criminal element to come to the surface. For a reported price tag of \$25,000, he bribed Sheikh Halil, who was in charge of the mosques on the Temple Mount, to let his expedition excavate under the mountain during this "holy week".

Of course, the Temple Mount would not be deserted and the bribe did not remove all risks. Parker and his men dressed as Arabs and conducted excavations by night in Solomon's Stables and in the well beneath the Foundation Stone. They continued throughout the week until finally they were about to dig where they were sure the Ark would be. But that night, one of the keepers of the mosque, apparently unaware of the "private arrangement" between Parker and the Sheikh, was sleeping on site and was awakened by the noise of the excavation going on below him. Rather than report to his superior, the man ran into the streets to reveal the sacrilege. A riot ensued and apparently the Turkish rulers had problems keeping the outraged crowds under control. The team was caught red-handed and everyone—or at least Parker—knew that this was the end. Later, Millen said he thought that the riots were incited by a member of the expedition whom they believed was a spy and who had made sure that the team would not succeed in uncovering the Ark. According to Millen, this suspicion was afterwards



confirmed to Juvelius by a high-ranking local official.

Now at the centre of a religious riot and international newspaper reports, Parker officially denied the rumours about illegal excavations and stated that the expedition had left the country as planned on 18 April, due to heavy rains which did not allow any further excavations.

The news of his illegal excavation arrived in the port town of Jaffa by telegraph before Parker did—just like it arrived at Juvelius's home before Parker told him. But what happened next

was rather bizarre: Parker was arrested upon his arrival on the accusation of stealing King Solomon's crown and ring, the Holy Ark and Mohammed's sword. In the turmoil of Jerusalem, it seemed, the conclusion was that the expedition had managed to escape with the treasures. Despite being arrested, Parker was able to escape and flee the country by sea.

What happened during that fateful night in April 1911? Were the rumours and press reports correct and did the Ark of the Covenant disappear together with Parker? Were they rushing from Jerusalem not in fear of the rioting mob but because they had to ship the Ark out of Jerusalem as quickly as possible? Did the authorities at first not realise that Parker had indeed discovered the Ark, then woke up to their mistake and had him arrested in Jaffa? Or did the authorities in Jaffa interpret the information from Jerusalem incorrectly?

In 1916, under the pen name Heikki Kenttä, Juvelius published a book entitled *Valkoinen kameeli* ("the White Camel"). The book is a collection of short stories, one of which contains Juvelius's version of the events which led to the riots in Jerusalem in 1911. Unfortunately the book is written as fiction, which makes any historical interpretation a quagmire at best. Furthermore, we know that Juvelius was not an eyewitness to the turbulent end of "his" expedition.

But back to the novel. In describing the riots, he argues that there was no desecration of the Omar Mosque; he even maintains that the team was working half a mile south of it. The rumours resulted from one of their finds: a decorated chair from the pre-Davidic era. Juvelius also writes that "there was much talk about ancient manuscripts", but does not elaborate. He also suggests that the central quest was not the Ark but the Tomb of Moses. As for the riots, he argues that they were a myth, blaming the press, which spread unsubstantiated rumours, and the Jews, who were highly suspicious of their work and used every possible means to find out what they were doing in an effort to obstruct their work.

As soon as the stories converge, they diverge again. And we need to wonder whether Juvelius was putting history right (difficult to do in a novel!) or rewriting it. As for the Tomb of Moses forming the goal of their quest, the alleged tomb is believed to be at Jebel Musa (Mount Nebo), to the northwest of Madaba, in Jordan, though other locations have also been put forward. Juvelius's novel has him visiting Mount Nebo, accompanied by a Finnish friend whom he shows a piece of paper with a Finnish translation of ancient manuscripts or Juvelius's

interpretation of those manuscripts. The text contains the exact measurements of a cave which, according to Juvelius, is the burial place of Moses. Juvelius argues that, according to the Bible, Moses died in a normal manner and therefore no doubt was properly buried in a cave hewn into the rock, where his embalmed body remained undisturbed to that day. Juvelius states that he

wanted to invalidate the claims that Moses had never existed. He also discusses the matter with a rabbi, whom he calls Jonathan ben Jochai, where Juvelius argues that the secrets of Moses' burial place were known to a select few of the Jewish sages and were passed on from one generation to another. When the Bible was committed to paper, the secrets were codified and incorporated into the text.

The framework is identical to his alleged decoding of the Ark of the Covenant's location from the Book of Ezekiel. In my opinion, Juvelius was rewriting history, trying to defuse the outrage of 1911 and perhaps even hoping that he could mount a second expedition, this time to discover the Tomb of Moses. Either way, it is clear that it was the illegal excavations under the Temple Mount that caused the outrage in Jerusalem in 1911; Juvelius was incidental in that event.

The rumours surrounding the expedition did not stop after the team's return to England. Apart from newspapers repeating what their treasure trove allegedly contained, they now also made reference to "ancient texts", left unspecified by

Juvelius in his fictional account. These reports referred to the texts as "ancient texts describing the Nocturnal Journey of Muhammad and documents promising the return of Jesus Christ". They suggested that the texts had nothing to do with ancient Jewish accounts, but were rather Arab or Christian in nature.

In England, Parker had trouble sounding convincing that his work had been purely scientific; everyone seemed to interpret the expedition as a treasure hunt, which of course it was. To cover himself, he rushed a scientific report of his expedition's activities into print. The book, published in 1911, was written by Vincent in French and translated into English by Parker himself. For obvious reasons, Juvelius was left out.

What did all of this mean for Juvelius? Though the Ark of the Covenant was (apparently) not recovered, his theory still held possibilities but it was equally clear that it would not be confirmed. It was largely due to Millen that the myth and the possibility of a future discovery were kept alive.



Map showing Juvelius's clearing operations under Jerusalem.

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To keep the light of intrigue burning, Millen claimed that Juvelius's material was stolen after 1911. Others reported that it was merely "lost".

If Parker found the Ark of the Covenant, it seems it did not change his lifestyle—but then, would anyone who discovered such a treasure give its existence away so easily? And if Parker did find it, Juvelius would more than likely *not* have been privy to this.

Juvelius returned to a normal life. From 1918 to 1922 he worked in the public library at Viipuri (Vyborg, Sweden), as its director.

According to Finnish researcher Voitto Viro, Juvelius made new maps of the Jerusalem underground network during the period 1919 to 1922 to replace the stolen (or lost) originals.

The maps remained in the possession of the Juvelius family, and researchers who have consulted and investigated these documents claim they are muddled and in places contradictory.

In short, they are useless. Of course, this may say little about the original maps—but

if they, too, were muddled, this would explain Parker's decision to abandon Juvelius's decodings and try to go it alone.

Juvelius died from throat cancer on Christmas Day 1922, at the age of fifty-seven. The Hebrew Bible that had served as the basis of his decipherment was buried with him.

It was around the time of Juvelius's death that Millen published his book; it would guarantee the survival of the Juvelius "myth". To make sure that he remained the centre of attention, Millen said that when he wrote his book he was pressured into leaving out certain details.

If true, it could merely have been some well-meant advice not to include outlandish claims; but what was implied was that there was more about the story than what could or should be publicly revealed. Furthermore, he supposedly placed his personal papers in a safe deposit box, bequeathing them to the Swedish Theosophical Society.

When the box was opened following his death, it was found to be totally empty.

The account of Juvelius has the hallmark of a group of idiots who tried to recover the Ark and failed miserably—and of a group

of idiots who tried to recover the Ark or other treasures and succeeded, but forever after had to deny everything. Both possibilities remain, though the latter is on balance extremely unlikely.

We know very little of the riots, and we don't even know whether the keeper checked first as to what was occurring beneath him before running into the streets, causing people to beat themselves into a frenzy.

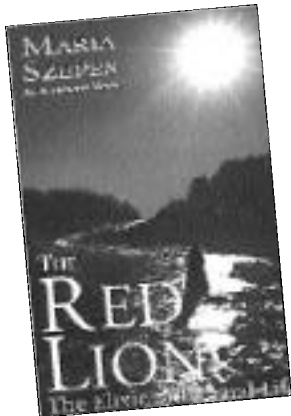
Perhaps the riots did need a legitimate cause, such as the theft of a discovered precious artefact, or perhaps not.

Just like Indiana Jones and his quest for the Ark, in the final outcome, if they ever did uncover something, it could only befall the same fate as the Ark does in that movie. Of quests that are illegally born, no legitimate offspring can ever be conceived.

About the Author:

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